

Release

from the South Carolina Forestry Commission

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Forestry Commission sends 13 more to help battle Western blazes

Latest deployment brings total of SCFC personnel dispatched out of state to 20

COLUMBIA—Responding to multiple requests from the U.S. Forest Service, the South Carolina Forestry Commission has sent 13 of its employees to join crews working on dozens of wildfires across four Western states.

Eight personnel were deployed to Texas, three to Idaho and one each to California and Washington in roles ranging from wildland firefighter and heavy equipment boss to public information officer and planning section chief.

While South Carolina has experienced a relatively mild fire season, the western United States is seeing one of the worst wildfire summers on record. The 13 SCFC employees were deployed just as six other Commission firefighters returned from a complex of fires in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest near Redding, Calif., where they spent two weeks working on a hand crew. In July, another Forestry Commission employee deployed for a week as a resource unit leader on the Tetlin Hills Fire in Tok, Alaska.

“Wildland firefighters from around the country are called to help on out-of-state assignments whenever large fires overwhelm local and even regional resources,” said SCFC Duty Officer Brad Bramlett. “It’s dirty, dangerous and exhausting work, but they are trained for it. And we’re happy to send help when we can because you never know when we may need out-of-state assistance. Always being prepared and ready to go is just part of the job.”

The employees are working under a cooperative agreement that the South Carolina Forestry Commission has with three federal firefighting agencies, the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. Their identities are not revealed for their and their families’ safety. “Despite the danger, it’s good for our team members to answer the call,” said SCFC Fire Protection Chief Darryl Jones. “Not only are they providing help in a range of critical areas, but they’re also getting valuable experience they can bring back home.”

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As the only state agency responsible for wildfire suppression in all unincorporated areas of the state, the South Carolina Forestry Commission protects 13.1 million acres from wildland fire. More than 500 county, municipal and volunteer fire departments operate more than 1,100 fire stations in South Carolina. The Forestry Commission cooperates with these departments to prevent and control structural and wildland fires, employing highly trained firefighters and specialized equipment when fires burn into forested areas that are difficult to reach.

Did you know...?

Escaped debris burns are the number one cause of wildfires in South Carolina. Of the state’s 1,823 wildfires in 2014, 952 were caused by debris burning, more than double all other fire causes combined. Arson/incendiary reasons are the second-leading cause at about 25%. Many people are surprised to learn that cigarettes, lightning, campfires and fireworks combine for only about 10% of wildfire origins.

